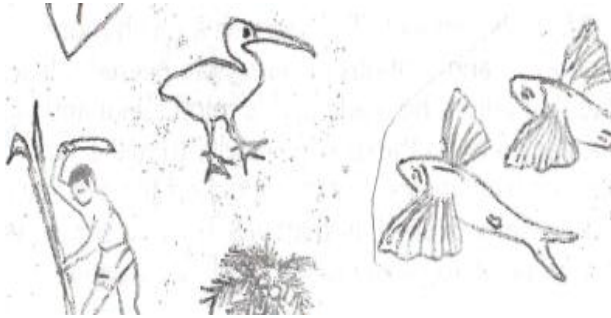


All day long creatures could be seen trying out swimming in the river, or bounding over the plain, or crawling under rocks. Under the trees they strutted about experimenting with whistling and cawing and



hooting, then they gathered to tell each other which sound they liked best. That was the way Owl decided on his slow, hooting voice, when the others told him how well it suited his big, round eyes and the fine way he slowly turned his head right round.



Crow and Tortoise sat on a log. There was a long pause while the thinking took place. Suddenly Crow sprang up. 'I know! I think I'd like to go straight through the air, not go with my claws on the ground like this, scrunch, scrunch, but with my feathers out. Like this!' Crow stretched out his feathers as wide as they would go. 'Flying, that's it! No one's done that yet. It would amaze everybody. It might be dangerous being up there in the big wind, but think of the excitement! Besides, what a way to see the world! Flying's the thing for me.'



'Me too,' said Tortoise. 'I'd love to fly. I don't know why I didn't think of it before. Floating with my feet spread out, like a leaf over everyone's head!'

The two friends told the other creatures that they had discovered a new way of travelling around. Soon they would fly like leaves in the wind.



At the beginning of the world the birds and the animals weren't always sure what they should be doing on the earth. Even simple things like what noises they should make or how they should travel around hadn't been worked out.



One day Crow and Tortoise were watching monkeys swinging high in the sunlit trees. They were very good friends, and enjoyed walking round looking at the world. Tortoise admired Crow's shiny black coat, and Crow loved the gleaming shell Tortoise wore, which in those days was smooth enough to use as a mirror.



'At least the monkeys are trying to do something interesting,' said Crow. 'The others are all doing easy things - walking and hopping and even just creeping. There must be something really different we could do'. . . Let me think . . . Hmmm 'I agree,' said Tortoise, and he started thinking too.



Next day Crow and Tortoise met the other creatures and told them the plan. They were going to climb a hill and fly down from the top. They set off. The others watched from below, growing very excited. No one had flown before. They looked up towards the top of the hill, shading their eyes against the sun. Yes! Crow and Tortoise had just reached the top! There they were, right at the edge. Soon they would fly!

Everyone below waited for Crow and Tortoise to take off. There they stood, Crow with his feathers already stretched out, Tortoise next to him, stretching out one leg at a time, as far as it would go.

A few creatures below began to worry. Rat said, 'Do you think they'll really fly?'

Cat said, 'What will happen if they don't?'

Others were sure Crow and Tortoise would fly. Mouse said, 'Tortoise is wise. He wouldn't fly without thinking hard about it first.'

'Yes,' Alligator said, 'He'll make a good instructor, and teach the rest of us how to fly.'

The creatures didn't have to wait long to find out what would happen. Up on the hilltop, Crow was saying, 'Are you ready, Tortoise?'

'Ready, Crow!'

'Right then! Off!'

Out from the hill they plunged. Zooooom! Flap, flap went Crow's feathers. Wag, wag went Tortoise's short legs.

Crow flapped and flapped his big black wings and stayed high in the blue sky, going up and up. Crow was flying! Down below, the creatures waved their paws and screamed and cheered in excitement.

But what was happening to Tortoise? He was falling, falling, falling. Feet were no use for flying, he realized as he tumbled dizzily, dizzily, head over tail over head over tail towards the ground. Most of the creatures below closed their eyes. Cat said, 'That's what I said would happen,' even though she hadn't.

Crash! A cloud of dust splashed up where Tortoise hit the ground. When it cleared the creatures rushed over and found Tortoise lying there, rubbing his head and peering around in dismay. His beautiful, smooth, shiny shell lay in pieces all round him! At least he was alive, though. Thank goodness!

The creatures scampered about picking up the pieces. They couldn't imagine the world without Tortoise and his beautiful shell. In hardly any time at all the pieces were spread next to each other on the ground. The pieces made the complete shell. All that was needed now was to glue them together and put Tortoise's house back on his shoulders.

That is what happened. But after it was put together again the shell wasn't smooth any more. It was bumpy and cracked-looking. The joins in the shell still show where it smashed apart on the day Tortoise decided to fly.

After his accident, Tortoise was a much more thoughtful and cautious creature. He peered this way and that before he made up his mind about anything. He started to do things very slowly, to make sure nothing went wrong the way it did on the sad day he lost his smooth shell. In that way Tortoise slowly, very slowly, came to be the wisest of all the creatures.



A Caribbean Myth